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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001254

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S MILITARY AND RULING AKP GOVERNMENT:
LIVING APART TOGETHER

REF: ANKARA 1153

(U) Classified by Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Since being elected in 2002, Turkey's pro-Islam Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has coexisted uneasily with the staunchly secular military. Direct communication between the Prime Ministry and military has dropped off demonstrably compared to previous eras; the AKP-dominated Parliament is unprepared and disinclined to exercise more oversight over the military; and President Sezer does not broker disagreements as former President Demirel did. The AKP government and military manage indirect communication on foreign policy issues through the MFA. The AKP government has tried to avoid confrontation and moved quickly to tamp down problems. How the accusations against Land Forces Commander Buyukanit are handled will test AKP-military relations. End Summary.

Less Communication Between PM and Military

12. (C) Turkey's military and civilian governments have never had daily, across-the-board, working-level communication; contact has generally taken place only at high levels. Such military-civilian relations as do exist have dropped off demonstrably since the AKP took power in late 2002.

13. (C) PM Erdogan advisor Nabi Avci assured us that communication between the Prime Ministry and military is more frequent than the media suggest. But according to a number of other observers, contacts are infrequent and communication strained.

14. (C) The National Security Council (NSC), which brings together civilian and military authorities, used to meet monthly. Since reforms instituted in 2003, it now meets half as often. Civilian and military authorities also convene at the twice-yearly Supreme Military Council. Four-star (ret.) General Ergin Celasin, who headed the NSC from 1997 until 1999, told us that, in addition to the monthly NSC meetings, he would meet with the PM one-on-one twice monthly. However, in all of 2005, PM Erdogan met one-on-one with CHOD Ozkok twice. So far in 2006, Erdogan and Ozkok have met once, on March 6, to discuss an indictment against Land Forces Commander Buyukanit (reftel). Erdogan also met with DCHOD Basbug in February. By contrast, CHOD Ozkok meets with

President Sezer every week.

¶5. (C) In former governments, the Prime Ministry Undersecretary coordinated government-military relations. However, the military so detests current PM Undersecretary Omer Dincer, who has openly argued that Turkey should become a more "Islamist" state, that Dincer is not allowed to enter military facilities. The military also will not meet with Erdogan foreign affairs advisor Ahmet Davutoglu, another Islamist. The PM's military advisor, a three-star general position created in 1993, still exists on paper but has fallen into disuse; PM advisor Avci could not even recall his name.

Parliament Not Inclined to Be Assertive

¶6. (C) AKP MPs have little expertise in defense issues (beyond obligatory service), have little contact with the military and have not played an assertive role in defense issues. Of the 16 AKP MPs on Parliament's National Defense Committee, only one, Vahit Erdem, has appreciable experience in defense issues (none of the eight opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) MPs has any). One AKP Defense Committee MP attended military academy, but did not become a career military professional. Erdogan's first choice for Parliament Defense Committee chair, Ramazan Toprak, was a former military officer. However, Toprak resigned quickly after press reports that he had been cashiered from the military for "fundamentalist" religious activities, saying he did not want to create controversy.

¶7. (C) Defense is one of Parliament's sleepest committees,

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meeting once or twice monthly. By contrast, the budget committee meets almost daily, the Foreign Affairs committee meets weekly. Erdem, who headed the Defense Industry Undersecretariat, told us he often skips Defense Committee meetings because they are not productive. Another Defense Committee AKP MP told us he spends much more time working on the Education, Culture, Youth and Sports Committee. There is little contact between Parliament and the military. The committee does not ask the military to brief them on defense issues, although Erdem thinks they should.

¶8. (C) While much of this represents little change from past governments, it suggests the AKP Parliament's disinclination to take on a more assertive role vis-a-vis the military. Even where Parliament has gotten more power, it has not used it. Although 2004 reforms gave Parliament's Speaker the power to request court audits of military and defense expenditures, the Speaker has never made such a request.

President Not an Effective Broker

¶9. (C) Former President Suleyman Demirel, despite having been jailed by the military, effectively brokered differences between civilian governments and the military from 1993 until ¶2000. Although the President still chairs the NSC, current President Sezer has been unable to take on Demirel's role. Sezer, a professional jurist, lacks Demirel's political skills, has shown distaste for politics, and seldom leaves the Presidency grounds. Moreover, a stout secularist himself, Sezer is not in a position to be a neutral broker on the thorniest issues between the AKP government and the military.

¶10. (C) Yigit Alpogan, the NSC's first civilian Secretary General, has tried unsuccessfully to fill the void. Former Demirel advisor Mehmet Ali Bayyar, a friend of Alpogan's, told us Alpogan is frustrated; by his own estimation, Alpogan is only "20% effective" in coordinating between the AKP government and the military.

¶11. (C) While AKP's elected officials have little regular contact with the military, the MFA's professional and overwhelmingly secular bureaucrats have regular working-level dialogue with their military counterparts. Indirectly, the MFA is a conduit for the military's views on a number of sensitive foreign policy issues. MFA officials working on NATO and disarmament issues, as well as Cyprus, are well-informed about military perspectives in their issue areas. During intense Cyprus discussions in the first part of 2004, MFA U/S Ziyal was in almost-daily contact with the military, and aware of both the military's redlines and areas of flexibility.

Avoiding Confrontation, Tamping Down Problems

¶12. (C) Despite their mutual dislike, the AKP government has consistently avoided confrontation with the military and moved quickly to tamp down problems (like Toprak's Defense Committee nomination). While the tension between them is political fact, AKP officials routinely go out of their way to declare, albeit implausibly, that they have no problems with the military.

¶13. (C) Erdogan's Defense Minister, Vecdi Gonul, was a choice designed not to ruffle military feathers. While pious, Gonul is low-key and an experienced bureaucrat from inside the state system. Unlike most other AKP Ministers, Gonul's wife does not wear a headscarf, a red flag for the secular military. Among other things, this means Gonul's wife can attend military receptions -- unlike Erdogan's.

¶14. (C) AKP officials moved rapidly to distance the government from a prosecutor's March 6 indictment calling for Land Forces Commander General Yasar Buyukanit to be charged with interfering with the judiciary (reftel). Both AKP government spokesman Cicek and PM spokesman Beki issued

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same-day statements denying AKP government connection with the prosecutor's action. PM Erdogan declared on March 7 that "we will oppose all activities to hurt the Turkish Armed Forces." Columnist Fehmi Kuru, generally supportive of the AKP government, wrote that the reason for the incident was to "Give the impression as if there were a conflict between the Turkish Armed Forces and the government." While there remains a strong possibility that some within the AKP were witting of -- if not totally involved in -- the Van prosecutor's action against Buyukanit, the speed of the leadership's public disavowal of the case is noteworthy.

¶15. (C) The AKP government has quickly retreated in other areas when the military has shown sensitivity. In the wake of PM Erdogan's August 2005 declaration that Turkey has a "Kurdish problem," CHOD Ozkok embarked on a series of speeches in the heavily ethnically-Kurdish southeast criticizing "ethnic nationalism," and making clear the military displeasure with Erdogan's comment. Erdogan has not repeated the phrase.

¶16. (C) Comment: While Buyukanit's current problems could pre-empt matters, the next obvious event in AKP government-military relations will come this summer when CHOD Ozkok is set to be replaced. Buyukanit for some time has been widely expected to take his place. Recent history would suggest PM Erdogan and his government will seek to avoid any perception of direct interference with Turkey's most widely respected institution. A pesky prosecutor, cacophonous press, jittery military nerves and clearly mixed motives among the AKP rank and file -- regarding the military in general and Buyukanit in particular -- will pose a serious test of Erdogan's leadership. End Comment.

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